GUIDE TO THE AO7 CENTRAL THAI FILE

[The AO7 Central Thai file contains a variety of information on one village, Bang Chan, located in Thailand's Central Plain, twenty miles northeast of Bangkok. Bang Chan is the village that was chosen for intensive study by the Cornell Thailand Project which began in the early 1950's. Hence there is a relatively large literature on many aspects of its lifestyle. The Central Thai, while not sharply distinct from the rest of the Thai population, are those Thai that inhabit the flat Chao Phraya basin around and north of Bangkok. The area (approximately 62,000 square miles) comprises 30% of Thailand's land area and contains 40% of the population. A 1975 estimate based on the 1960 census (26,392,000) and a 3.1% growth rate yields an approximate population for all Thailand of 43 million and for Central Thailand of 17,200,000 (though this is probably slightly high). The Chao Phraya Valley is the most densely populated part of the country. The Central Thai speak the Central or Bangkok dialect of Thai, which is the nation's official language and has approximately ten million speakers (1960). Dialect differences within Thai are only slight and mutually intelligible among all Thai speakers. Thai is generally considered to be part of the Sino-Thai branch of the Sino-Tibetan stock. However there are some who feel it is closer to the Indonesian languages. It is spoken by 85% of the Thai population. While exposed to the more urban and Western influences and commodities found in Bangkok, the Central Thai are still overwhelmingly rural rice agriculturalists who generally work and own their own land. Two types of settlement pattern are commonly found. Some settlements are strung along roads and water courses with the fields behind the houses, while others are circular clusters of houses or compounds surrounded by their fields and connected to the main road by a path. Village size ranges from 300-3000. Rice is the dietary staple, but fish are also an important source

of food since canals and rivers abound. Rice is also the country's chief export. Yams, cassava, chilies, eggplant, and beans are also grown for food. Commerical crops include sugar cane, tobacco, rubber, coconuts, condiments, and cotton. Besides agricultural labor, the Thai staff the government and upper professional positions, but the Chinese (the second largest ethnic group in the country) occupy most of the commercial and artisan jobs. The nuclear family is the basic social unit, but extended families are frequent. Descent is ambilineal and the personal kindred is a person's most important group. Kin terms are also used to indicate respect and friendship. Polygyny is present though not common. Postmarital residence is generally neolocal, but poorer couples often remain with the bride's family for a few years. In any case, village endogamy is preferred. Social stratification is based on age, occupation, wealth, and residence. But Central Thai society is more of a ranked than a class society, with passage up and down the scale easy and common. 93.6% of the population identify themselves as Theravada Buddhists (1960). The religious practices however, have a strong mixture of pre-Buddhist animism as well as Brahmanic beliefs.

As of 1956, Bang Chan was a village of 296 households and 1,771 people (1956 census, 4: Phillips, p. 15). It is spread over an area of five square miles allowing people to be near their fields. It contains a Buddhist monastery and an elementary school which give this dispersed village its identity as a unit. It is composed of seven hamlets of both the settlement types mentioned above, but the linear pattern predominates. Because of a decentralized administration divided between the hamlets and two communes into which they are divided, community-wide projects and a sense of village solidarity do not exist except for religious festivals. The nuclear family and loosely defined kindred are the principal groups with which people identify. The school, the monastery and the nation-state are the only other

institutions which serve as foci of loyalty (4: Phillips, p. 22). The district or amphur has been marked for category 634. Only one hour by road and three by canal from Bangkok, the people of Bang Chan are much more cosmopolitan than their more rural countrymen. Bangkok provides jobs, schools, markets, entertainment and mass communication not available to most rural Thai. Despite their proximity to a city of over two million, they are principally rice cultivating peasants, whose lives are centered on the land. It was chosen by Cornell as a site to study cultural change.

There are seven sources in this file, all in English. All of them are directly or indirectly connected with the Cornell Thailand Project. The fieldwork on which they are based was part of an organized program and was carried out for varying lengths of time between 1948 and 1957. Unfortunately there is no single wide-perspective community study of Bang Chan in the file. The sources discuss a number of specific areas with only brief mention of the overall situation. The introductory chapter to 4: Phillips (category 116, pp. 14-38) provides the best summary of life in the village. 1: Hanks concerns maternity, its associated rituals and attitudes toward modern medicine in Bang Chan. 2: Hauck et al. discusses food habits and nutrition. 3: Hauck et al. discusses the nutritional health of mothers and children. 4: Phillips is a study of Thai peasant personality based on interpersonal relations and psychological tests (sentence completion) in Bang Chan. 5: Hauck et al. contains medical, biological and demographic data on health, sanitation, nutrition, and anthropometry. 6: Goldsen and Ralis concerns factors significant in the acceptance of innovations in such areas as medicine and agriculture. Contact with the urban life style either through residence or mass communication was found to be the main factor. 7: Janlekha is a dissertation on the economic development of Bang Chan and the effects of its confrontation with the Western economic system. The file contains data that is not

widely accessible and is the product of a coordinated project. It does however lack the diversity it might have. The file was processed between 1969 and 1973.]